

# Around the LOCAL NEWS Community

## Hidden Sparks Helps Local Schools Achieve Advances in Education

If you ask Joyce Schonbrun, Learning Center Director at Bnos Bais Yaakov of Far Rockaway, how partnering with Hidden Sparks has changed the learning environment at her school, she will tell you, “Teachers are achieving a new level of awareness and sensitivity towards the individual child, and looking at their individual qualities as part of the whole.” This sentiment is echoed by Malka, a teacher at the school and Hidden Sparks trained coach, “As teachers, there are things we have a sense of in the back of our heads, but Hidden Sparks training clarifies and builds on our understanding

of children, and helps me in my day-to-day teaching.”

Hidden Sparks continues to remain at the forefront of advancing Jewish education by addressing the needs of diverse learners and day schools’ capacity to reach all students. Over 50 educators from Hidden Sparks participating schools from New York, New Jersey, Baltimore and Chicago recently gathered at the Hidden Spark’s Annual Coach Retreat at The Museum of Jewish Heritage to discuss new ways to reach and motivate students with all levels of ability. Teachers and principals from over 20

Jewish day schools gathered to brainstorm on inventive techniques for teaching children. This event furthers Hidden Spark’s mission to help Jewish educators discover, understand and support all of the students in their classrooms, especially those with learning difficulties.

Aliza Scharf, a teacher and coach at Shulamith School for Girls, shared her reaction to the day: “I’m always impressed by any Hidden Sparks programming. Hidden Sparks is a gift to any school and I’ve been so happy to be a part of the Hidden Sparks family—a group of professionals who care about education and are there for the children. The retreat is an opportunity for a community of learners to share experiences, as well as get advice and feedback.”

True to its name, Hidden Sparks aims to identify students whose potential has not yet been reached – in school and in life. Founded in New York just eight years ago with a pilot program in seven schools, Hidden Sparks now works in 33 schools in New York alone. Hidden Sparks is a recipient of the prestigious Covenant Foundation Signature grant, and four time recipient of the Slingshot Award, recognizing the 50 most innovative Jewish organizations. Last year, Hidden Sparks partnered with SHEMESH in Baltimore and REACH in Chicago and trained educators in Nashville, New Orleans, Tampa and Hollywood, Florida, to bring the program to those cities. The heart of Hidden Sparks is its coaching work with 76 coaches who are working with 161 teachers and impacting approximately 1,635 students. Since its inception, Hidden Sparks has trained 95 coaches, more than 1,000 teachers and has reached an estimated 11,000 students.

Debbie Niderberg, Executive Director of Hidden Sparks, explains, “Teachers find the curriculum and approach so compelling because it provides them with immediate strategies to reach the challenging students and with a lens for understanding them. More than that, it provides a ‘habit of mind’ to look more deeply at what may be going on and to try to pinpoint the obstacle before jumping to conclusions and labeling students. We work to support both the student and teacher and to nurture maximally welcoming classrooms and schools.”

According to Dr. Evelyn Gross, an administrator in the middle school at Shulamith who will be joining Hidden Spark’s inaugural Leadership Training



*Aliza Scharf from Shulamith of Long Island and Barbara Deutsch from HANC at a recent Hidden Sparks Retreat*

program, “Faculty members who have had the good fortune to collaborate with the Hidden Sparks internal and external coaches have reaped tremendous benefits. It has helped them look at their students through a variety of lenses in their attempt to understand each of their students’ diverse learning styles. Our teachers are learning to help students understand and capitalize on their cognitive strengths while they compensate for weaknesses.” Mrs. Rookie Billet, principal at the school, concurs, “Having Hidden Sparks coaches work with the teachers has been a boon to Shulamith. They have contributed to more dialogue, collaboration, and reflection on student learning.”

Embarking on its first year of cultivating a leadership community amongst principals is core to Hidden Sparks ability to build capacity and long term sustainability within schools, according to Elizabeth Fox, Director of Education. She feels strongly that “establishing a culture of support from the top is required if change is to be effective and meet the learning and behavior needs of all students in a school. “The success of the initial projects developed by Hidden Sparks has led to others that enhance and expand upon its mission. Hidden Sparks Without Walls program (HSWOW) continues to be a resource for educators and parents across the country by bringing free audio and online hour-long classes to educators and parents to enhance educators’ knowledge of the field of diverse learning and parents’ understanding of learning and behavior. Hidden Sparks funding comes from individuals, foundations, government and Jewish charities.

*To learn more about the webinars for parents or teachers, and other Hidden Sparks programs, log onto [www.HiddenSparks.org](http://www.HiddenSparks.org).*



*Dr. Rona Novick, Educational Director for Hidden Sparks, trains educators at the retreat*

## HANC College Guidance Visits Local Communities

As part of the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County’s College Guidance Department’s new and innovative programming, parents of our high school junior class were invited to attend one of two college planning nights in local communities.

On February 19th, Director of College Guidance Ms. Karen Sheff, and Assistant Director of College Guidance Mrs. Marisa Gelb hosted parents at the Young Israel of West Hempstead. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, a second event was held at the Mashadi Jewish Center of Great Neck.

**In a discussion led by Ms. Sheff and Mrs. Gelb,** parents learned more about the SAT/ACT exams, subject tests, financial aid, scholarships, Naviance, application timelines, college visitations and more. These programs provided parents with critical informa-

tion regarding the college planning process and prompted conversations about their children’s academic futures.

These events brought HANC’s College Guidance Department closer to home for HANC families, and they provide a unique approach to college planning that was well received by those in attendance.

Riesterer’s Kosher Bakery generously donated cookies for the West Hempstead session while those who attended the Great Neck event were treated to a lovely spread provided by the Mashadi Jewish Center.

Thank you to the West Hempstead and Great Neck communities for welcoming HANC into their local synagogues. HANC College Guidance looks forward to visiting additional communities in the future.